CORA VIOLA HOWELL SLAUGHTER
Southern Arizona Ranchwoman

by
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Cora Viola Howell blushed to remember how she must have looked at age seventeen, "riding sidesaddle . . . hair all flying about," the first time she encountered rancher John Horton Slaughter. She was helping her father and brother drive the family's small herd of livestock from Nevada to Texas in the late summer of 1877. As they passed through the settlement of Holbrook, Arizona Territory, she got a glimpse of the thirty-six-year-old Texan, who was sitting on the porch of a little hotel. She had no way of knowing that she would become his wife.

In the early 1840s, the lure of free land had brought John Slaughter's slave-holding family from Louisiana to Texas, where they eventually settled in Atacosa County, southwest of San Antonio. When the Civil War broke out, John, his two older brothers, and their father all enlisted in the Confederate Army. They spent most of their service defending the Texas frontier against hostile Kiowa and Comanche Indians. In the decade after the war, John and his brother Charlie, by then young ranchers with families, decided to move west—Charlie to New Mexico Territory, and John to Arizona. When the Howells first saw John in Holbrook, he was looking for a permanent place to settle.

Viola also came from a family of perambulating Southerners. Her father, Amazon Howell, was a great-grandson of

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Viola Howell at age four.

Daniel Boone. According to family tradition, Boone had named him for the Amazon River in Kentucky. His nickname, "Cap," was a souvenir of his days as a prosperous riverboat captain in Missouri. A slave-holder, Amazon Howell was a fervent Confederate. Viola remembered that as a four-year-old, she skipped about, shouting, "I secessionist, by God!," an expression she learned from her father.

Having lost everything in the war, in 1865 Amazon Howell and his family joined a caravan of Missourians headed for Montana. For the next ten or twelve years, the Howells lived in Montana, Utah, and Nevada, where Amazon worked at various occupations. Mary Ann Howell, Viola's mother, was homesick for the South, so about 1877, the family started back home, intending to settle in Texas. Crossing the Colorado River at Lee's Ferry, they camped for the summer near Flagstaff, living off deer, antelope, wild turkey, and an occasional bear. That fall, they continued on to a farm in New Mexico Territory, south of Roswell on the Pecos River. There, a year or so later, they once again encountered John Slaughter.

Slaughter, by then widowed and with two small children, was waiting for his cowboys and a herd of cattle from Texas. By the time the cattle arrived and Slaughter was ready to return to Arizona, he and Viola were in love and contemplating marriage. Viola's mother objected to the match because of Slaughter's children, the couple's age difference, their brief courtship, and John's addiction to gambling.[1]

But Viola's father apparently had a different opinion. He abandoned his plans for Texas, packed up his family, threw his cattle in with Slaughter's large herd, and started the trek to Arizona. Enjoying the blessing of her father and ignoring the objections of her mother, on April 16, 1879, Viola Howell married John Slaughter in the little hamlet of Tularosa, New Mexico. She was eighteen, he was thirty-seven.

In spite of the obstacles, the Slaughter marriage lasted over four decades. The windblown girl on the horse became wife, stepmother, nurse, housekeeper, equestrienne, poker player—as much an Arizona legend as her husband. Her pampered southern-style upbringing, combined with life on the frontier, prepared her for the varied roles.

Viola in Nevada, probably at age sixteen.

The newlywed Mrs. Slaughter, photographed by C. S. Fly.

The Slaughter and Howell families arrived in the Sulphur Springs Valley in May 1879. Slaughter's choice of southeast Arizona for a permanent location was a good one. There were lush grazing lands for the taking, and prospectors had recently discovered gold and silver in the hills southwest of the Dragoon Mountains. The influx of ore-hungry settlers gave birth to Tombstone, a boomtown that became the largest community between New Orleans and San Francisco.

The newlyweds stayed in the valley for about three months. During that time, Slaughter sent cowboys back to Texas for a second herd of cattle, while he made several trips to the San Carlos Indian Reservation to deliver on a beef contract he had signed with the government agency. Viola "was dreadfully afraid of the Indians and when they would try to stop [the Slaughters] . . . to beg for tobacco . . . [she] made Mr. Slaughter throw it out to them while still moving."

By her own admission, in the early years of her marriage, a fearful Viola was "forever making Indians and outlaws out of Spanish daggers and cacti on the desert." She conjured up a

grave in every prairie-dog mound and became hysterical at every river or stream she had to ford. After one long hard drive from Fort Grant to Tombstone, nightfall caught her and John, and they had to make camp. Viola insisted that she saw three men lurking nearby. Knowing he would have no peace all night unless he convinced her there was no danger, John walked over and calmly "kicked one of the men—a cacti [*sic*]!"

But Viola could also rise to the occasion. When she heard a (false) report that John had been killed on a cattle drive in Sonora, she insisted on going down to bring his body back—alone, if necessary.

John had not planned to burden his young bride with caring for his children. When his first wife, Adeline, died of smallpox in Phoenix in 1878, he had placed the youngsters with a caretaker family in Tucson, until he could send them to Texas to live with his brother. But when the children came for a visit, Viola became so attached to them that she asked John to let them stay permanently. Addie was six and a half years old and Willie was nineteen months. Viola "loved them as if [she] had been their own mother and they were always passionately fond of [her]." During the first few years of the marriage, Addie and Willie spent a good deal of time with Mrs. Howell, who usually lived nearby. Viola felt strongly that a woman's place was with her husband, so she traveled with John on cattle drives, business trips, and even when he transported prisoners during his tenure as Cochise County sheriff.[2]

About three months after arriving in Arizona, the new family moved to a site on the San Pedro River south of Hereford. Their first ranch home was small, "fashioned of tree branches set in the ground and chalked [calked] in with mud. It had no floor, just dirt." In the two-room "picket house on the San Pedro," where the dirt roof leaked dust onto the Mexican rawhide chairs and beds, with only a fireplace for cooking, Viola Slaughter learned to manage a home.

John was patient with his bride. One day while trying to handle the fireplace as well as a great copper kettle full of "potatoes with the skins on and then green corn, shucked, on top," Viola twice spilled the vegetables on the dirt floor. The first time, she washed the potatoes and corn off and put them

back in the kettle. The second time, she "walked off in a temper and left them. But Mr. S[laughter] quietly picked them up, washed off the lot and finished getting the meal."

Charleston, a few miles north of Hereford, was also booming during the early 1880s as the milling town for ore from Tombstone. Slaughter opened a wholesale and retail meat market in Charleston and also supplied meat all along the new railroad line between Benson and Nogales. In 1881 he imported a third herd of cattle from Texas, bringing his livestock numbers to 2,500 head and making him the second largest rancher in the San Pedro Valley.[3]

On that occasion, Viola and Addie accompanied John on the train from Benson to Deming, New Mexico, where they planned to connect up with their cowboys, who were bringing a light wagon full of supplies from Hereford. On arrival in Deming, however, they found that the weather had turned bitterly cold, and the ranchhands and the wagon were nowhere to be found. The Slaughter party—which included Viola's brother, Stonewall Jackson Howell, who had decided at the last minute to go along—sought shelter in the only housing in the tiny settlement, a mailcar on a railroad siding. However, the occupant turned them away. Forced to camp on the desert for two nights, the four shivering travelers shared Stonewall's double blankets and a quilt before they learned that their cowboys were waiting behind them, ten miles north of Lordsburg.

After they had reunited with the cowboys, wagon, and supplies, the Slaughters pressed on to the Rio Grande. Fording the large herd across the river, the drovers returned westward across the mountains. Near Fort Bayard, a great snowstorm struck and howled for three days. The cowboys built fires to keep the animals from freezing to death, but were themselves less fortunate. They had no tents, and the snow piled so heavily on their bedrolls that the herders could barely turn over. The only person out of the seventeen "who escaped having some part of her frozen" was little Addie, wrapped in a big buffalo robe as she rode in the bottom of the light wagon that Viola drove.

A second snowstorm struck after the herd had left the mountains and entered the treeless plains. John paid $10 for a

log to build a small campfire. Along one particularly dry stretch of the trail, a rancher charged 25 cents per head for well water. Slaughter could afford to water only the weakest cattle and sent the best-conditioned ones on. In addition to bad weather and scarce water, Indians posed a threat. Viola later learned that they had killed a stagecoach driver and his three passengers near the spot where the Slaughters had camped the night before. Despite the ordeal, the humans and most of the cattle made it safely to Arizona.

In 1883, John sold his cattle, and with Viola and the children started for Oregon to establish a long-desired ranch on the Snake River. The family traveled from Arizona through Colorado to Salt Lake City by train, then took a stagecoach from Ogden to Boise City. The journey from Utah to Idaho took five days and four nights, but for the first leg of the trip, the Slaughters had the coach to themselves and stretched out in some comfort.

At one stop, the station agent warned John about " 'tough characters hanging around' " and advised him to turn any money in his possession over to the driver for safekeeping. Uttering a "big oath," Slaughter, who was carrying a tremendous amount of cash in his money belt, told the agent, "Well, I have no money with me and if I did, I am damn well able to care for it myself." John secretly handed the money over to Viola, figuring he would be the primary target of any robbery attempt. They learned later that the agent was actually an accomplice of the stagecoach robbers.

The Slaughters made it to Boise unmolested by criminals. But while waiting for two employees who were driving overland with a wagon and team of horses, John began hemorrhaging—he suffered all his life from asthma and tuberculosis—so the Slaughters decided to return to the Southwest for his health. While one of the hired hands returned home on the stage, the other, Tad Rowland, accompanied John, Viola, and the children as they drove back the many miles to Silver City, New Mexico.

There John secured a contract to supply beef to the railroad under construction from Silver City to Deming. Until John joined them, Viola and the children stayed with her par-

ents, who had established a "milk ranch" at Williams Springs near Tombstone. Then the family rented a house in Tombstone, and John began looking for a ranch to buy.[4]

Through Tad Rowland, Slaughter heard that the old Mexican San Bernardino land grant was for sale. The tract encompassed a good part of the San Bernardino Valley in the extreme southeastern corner of Cochise County, and the neighboring Mexican state of Sonora. The Perilla and Pedregoza mountains bounded the property to the west, the Peloncillos and Guadalupes lay to the east. The San Simon Valley watershed formed the northern border; Pitaicachi Peak in Sonora, the southern. Originally developed by Ignacio Pérez and his relatives in the 1820s, the grant lay deserted for some fifty years because of Apache depredations in the 1830s. The large, fortified hacienda was in ruins.[5]

John decided to buy the land sight unseen, and, with Viola, set off at once for Guaymas, Sonora, to meet with Guillermo Andrade, the agent-owner. As the Slaughters waited to board the train at Fairbanks, they learned that Andrade was on the eastbound train and would be in Benson until noon the next day. John immediately fired off a telegram in which he offered to buy the vast ranch. During the next few months, Slaughter traveled to Nogales and Magdalena, Sonora, where he negotiated a ninety-nine-year lease on approximately 65,000 acres of grasslands. The cost was $1.25 per acre, part of which John paid with borrowed money.

The ranch was worth the price. Grass "waist and shoulder high" blanketed the long, oval San Bernardino Valley, which boasted ten natural springs and intermittently flowing streams. Viola never forgot her first view from Silver Creek, "the valley stretching far out before us down into Mexico, rimmed and bounded by mountains all around . . . the thrill of knowing it was all ours, [that] our future lay within it. It was beautiful."

Slaughter built two adobe houses, one for his in-laws, and the other for himself, his ranch foreman, and the cowboys. Viola maintained their Tombstone home so that the children could go to school: twelve-year-old Addie, six-year-old Willie, and Jimmie Howell, Viola's younger brother, who was also about twelve. Viola's older brother, Stonewall, lived at the ranch,

Viola's brother Jimmy, cousin Jesse Fisher, and brother Stonewall.

Amazon and Mary Ann Howell.

but she and the children were there only during the summers. John shuttled between Tombstone and the San Bernardino, buying and selling cattle and tending to the meat market he had opened in Tombstone.

The first Slaughter buildings went up near the unfenced Mexican border and the old hacienda ruins, close to large flowing springs and a cienega (marsh). Both dwellings and all the ranch outbuildings collapsed completely in the earthquake that shook southern Arizona and northern Sonora on March 3, 1887. Viola and John were safe in Tombstone at the time, but Amazon Howell narrowly escaped death when the walls of his house caved in. After the narrow escape, the Howells moved to Tombstone. Undaunted, John rebuilt on the ranch, at the base of the high Mesa de la Avanzada.[6]

While the family was living in Tombstone, John served two terms as Cochise County sheriff, from 1886 to 1890. Consequently, he was often away from home and Viola was "always nervous." She insisted that an elderly neighbor sleep on a cot in the hall, or that her brother and cousin stay with her. She "pinned the shades to the woodwork, wouldn't even allow the transom open for fear someone would come in. [She] was simply scared to death." When John declined to run for a third term, the Democratic county chairman asked why. Viola replied that John "loved his work as sheriff more even than he loved his ranch," but "I do not think I could stand another term."

The Slaughters' first few years at the San Bernardino were difficult financially. The cattle boom had collapsed in 1885, and prices plummeted, followed by drought. "It seemed as if nature, the cattle market, and many things were conspiring against [them]." In 1892, Viola told her husband that they should give up the Tombstone house and live on the ranch full-time. He "simply wouldn't listen," but she insisted:

> Yes, Mr. Slaughter, we are. We'll all go out there and put our shoulders to the wheel. We can't give up now and I can help . . . just you give me a plain house with wide board floors, muslin ceilings and board finishes around the adobes. That's all I want. But I'm coming out.

Viola had her way. The family moved permanently to San Bernardino, living first in the "three-room adobe [at the base of Mesa de la Avanzada that was] later used for the school house, still later burned and rebuilt into a two-room house." In late 1892 or early 1893, John began building another house across the pond from where they were living—the rambling ranch home that became synonymous with the Slaughter name, and which was to Viola the stage of "all the happiness our work, struggles and play gave us at the San Bernardino."[7]

In addition to being a stepmother to John's children, Viola raised a number of foster children. Some were orphans, some came from broken homes, some from impoverished families where their health and welfare were in jeopardy. Viola and John provided all of the youngsters with a good upbringing, schooling, and plenty of love. Over the years, the Slaughters befriended more than a dozen children. The color of a child's skin made no difference to them. At one point, in 1896, four youngsters lived at the ranch: Mexican, black, Anglo, and Apache.

Apache May, Blanche Anderson, Lola Robles, Little Arthur Fisher.

In 1895, Lola Robles, the Mexican girl, came to the ranch from a broken home when she was about five years old and stayed for fourteen years. As a mature, beautiful young woman, she often returned to the San Bernardino from Tucson, bringing her own children to visit the Slaughter family.

Blanche Anderson, a black girl from Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, lived at the ranch for only a year or so when she was about fourteen. But her eleven-year-old brother, Frank, or "Pancho," begged to stay with the Slaughters. He answered each question that Viola posed—"Can you ride a horse? Can you milk? Can you tend a house?"—with "No, but I can learn." Pleased with the clothes she gave him, especially shoes, which he had never worn before, Pancho Anderson went to the Slaughter ranch in 1900. He lived there until he served in World War I, and remained a dependable friend, helping Viola in her later years after John died.

"Little Arthur" Fisher, so-called to distinguish him from his father, Arthur, Sr., came to the San Bernardino when he was about two, after his parents separated. His father, Viola's cousin, ranched in Mexico and could not keep the boy with

Viola and Apache May.

him. Young Arthur was a "wonderful cow hand even before he was large enough to saddle his own horse without climbing up into the wagon," but he never took advantage of the schooling the Slaughters offered. He was the one child Viola raised of whom she was not proud.

John found the Indian girl in 1896, when he joined American soldiers in an attack on an Apache ranchería in the Guadalupe Mountains south of the border. After routing the Indians, the men were getting ready to set fire to the abandoned brush shelters. As John walked into one of the wickiups, he poked a bundle of bedding on the ground with the butt of his gun. It stirred, and he realized there was a child inside—a little girl about a year old. He took her back to the ranch, and when they failed to find her mother, he and Viola determined to raise the child themselves. They named her "Apache May" for the month in which John found her, but the family affectionately called her " 'Pache" (Patchy). 'Pache and Lola became fast friends, eating and sleeping together and learning English. Little Arthur joined them at the ranch that fall. Apache May was the pet of the household until she died in 1900, after her dress caught fire as the children were playing.[8]

The turn of the century and the early 1900s were the heyday of the San Bernardino. In addition to being the center of a working ranch, the Slaughters' commodious home was an oasis in southeastern Arizona. Situated on the only road through the area, it was sixty-five miles from Tombstone, forty-five from Bisbee, and eighteen from Douglas (after that town's founding in 1901). The Slaughters extended their special brand of hospitality to everyone. It seemed like "open house" 365 days a year as John and Viola entertained a constant stream of business associates, soldiers, schoolteachers, Arizona rangers, family members, neighbors, surveyors, passersby, and friends from all over the territory.

The ranch was a mecca for health-seekers, who, in the early days, paid for the privilege and returned again and again. Miss Phelps, a wealthy young lady from Los Angeles (who had just received $10,000 for her birthday) insisted on staying, though Viola told her they had no room and she would have to sleep on the porch. The visitor replied that the cot was fine

with her, since fresh air was just what she wanted. Another guest, Frederick Baxter of San Francisco, was so enthralled with the ranch that he ended up staying for months. In 1911, he returned on his honeymoon so his bride could see the San Bernardino.

Emilio Kosterlitsky, head of the Mexican *rurales* (rural police), frequently called on the Slaughters. Viola found Kosterlitsky to be handsome, intelligent, and entertaining, but she thought he must be "an awful liar" because he "told some of the most terrible stories about how he treated men, what he did to them. . . . No, I never believed the stories."

One overnight guest asked if the Slaughters ever played cards. "In an innocent tone" Viola replied, "once in a while." The visitor knew immediately that he was in trouble when he watched Viola expertly shuffle the cards "clear up to her elbow." It seemed that once the soldiers had left the ranch after the Apache campaigns, John so missed the nightly poker games that he taught Viola and Addie how to play, and Viola had learned quite well.

Some guests stayed on permanently. The teacher for the ranch school, which operated from 1902 to 1911, lived with the family, as did Viola's mother, Gramma Howell, who made her home with the Slaughters from 1902 until her death in 1920. In addition, a number of elderly or ailing relatives and friends resided at the ranch. Edith Stowe, a Bisbee schoolteacher, lived with Viola and John from the early 1900s until her death in 1938. Over the years, Edith served as John's secretary and bookkeeper, the ranch postmistress, clerk, chauffeur, assistant hostess, and companion and close friend of both Addie and Viola.

The Slaughter household easily consumed a day's baking: thirty-four loaves of bread, biscuits, cornbread, rolls, cakes, pies, and cookies. The ranch cattle supplied meat and milk, with supplemental butter brought in tubs from town. The garden, strawberry patch, vineyard, and orchards provided vegetables and fruits that Viola, Gramma Howell, and their helpers canned, preserved, and fermented.

The Slaughters brought ice by wagon from Douglas and "shoved [it] down a chute." Cold storage held up to three beef

carcasses at a time. Viola kept milk, cream, eggs, and other perishables in the springhouse just above the hydraulic pump that sent water to a storage tank above the icehouse. A giant refrigerator in the icehouse held restaurant-sized quantities of food, great shelves bulged with jars of fruit and preserves, and a massive meat block stood nearby.[9]

Viola always had domestic help. Her first houseboy, John Swain, was a black man who had come to Arizona from Texas with the early herds. Later, Pancho Anderson assisted with the laundry, among other chores. Several Hispanic and Indian girls lent a hand in the kitchen over the years. In the beginning, John thought that only blacks could cook, but Viola finally persuaded him to let her hire a Chinese chef. After some initial discontent, Slaughter and the cowboys accepted the new arrangement. Eventually, the Slaughters had several Chinese cooks, all remembered as proficient in the kitchen. Viola and her helpers fed at least twenty-five people each day, including the single cowboys. At times, the number swelled to as many as forty.

The Slaughter family and guests ate in the main dining room, which, as John and Viola became more affluent, sported "the finest of linens, silver, china, and . . . excellent service . . . only the best of manners were allowed." Viola half-jokingly ruled that "if a man had a cow he ate with us, if he didn't, he ate in the Mexican [cowboy] dining room." She actually welcomed the hands in the main room, but they preferred the other room where they could go coatless and wear spurs, for Viola allowed only John to wear spurs to the table. Women could not appear in the divided skirts worn for horseback riding. Latecomers prepared their own food and ate in the cowboy dining room.

As the Slaughters' social status rose, some neighboring ranch wives grew jealous of Viola's commodious home, indulgent husband, fine buggy and horses, the earliest and best of automobiles, and attentive servants. Viola not only slept late in the mornings, but she bathed and dressed for dinner as well, unusual habits for a ranch wife.

John had a real addiction to gambling and was unable to

stop completely, in spite of an early promise to Viola. He could easily gamble all night for "money, cattle, all sorts of things." Eventually the couple reached a compromise whereby John turned a large portion of his winnings over to Viola, who used it to purchase such luxuries as large Navajo rugs.

Even in the early years of her marriage, before they lived on a grand scale, the Slaughter name carried weight. During a solo shopping trip to Tombstone from the San Pedro ranch, Viola sought a room at the San Jose House hotel. The proprietress thought "the smart young lady" was a prostitute and nearly turned her out before Viola identified herself. "My goodness, Mrs. Slaughter, I didn't know you," apologized the woman. "When I saw you come off the stage, a lone woman, . . . I just decided we couldn't take you. But of course, Mrs. Slaughter, we have a room for you."

Some members of the community thought Viola was stuck up or "haughty," but she chalked it up to her poor memory for names and faces. When she lived in Tombstone, she often sent the delivery boy back two or three times a day for groceries she had forgotten to buy. When she moved to the San Bernardino Ranch, John insisted that she keep paper handy to jot down her shopping list as she thought of it. "I say," he told her, "we can't have Old Bat [his ranch hand of many years] on the road all the time." On the street in Douglas, Viola once passed without speaking to a boy who had been living at the ranch for several months. "Aunt Vi," he asked, "if Uncle John went away for three months, would you remember him?"

Viola was conscious of her status as the wife of one of southern Arizona's wealthiest ranchers. On a family outing to the Grand Canyon in 1903, Viola and her party arrived late and went directly to the dining room. Whether due to the lateness of the hour or because the group was in traveling clothes, a black waiter did not provide the service Viola expected. She caused a scene that embarrassed other members of her party, asking the manager if he intended to "take her word, or the nigger's," and demanded to know if he realized that she was Mrs. John Slaughter.[10]

When Willie and Addie began producing grandchildren,

Viola "put her foot down . . . I've been Aunty Slaughter and he's been Uncle John to half of Cochise County and we're not going to be called Grandma and Grandpa." They settled for "Aunty" and "Daddy" or "Uncle John." Friends and employees called John "Don Juan," but, pleading her southern background, Viola always addressed her husband as "Mr. Slaughter."

Early in the marriage, Viola became the one who tended to illnesses and injuries. She treated Old Bat's abcessed ear and got up at night to give doses of quinine to ranch employees ill with malaria. Ailing Slaughter cowboys came from as far away as the Animas Valley in New Mexico, for "no one could beat [Viola] in taking care of blood poisoning."

On one occasion she bundled John, suffering from a badly infected finger, into a wagon and headed for Tombstone. They made camp at nightfall, still sixteen miles from town, but when his condition worsened, she "stood up in the buggy whipping the dun horses all the way in, [unable] to see anything ahead because of the darkness." Though the doctor wanted to amputate Slaughter's hand and part of his arm, John "simply wouldn't hear to it and [Viola and John] set about treating it with . . . home remedies and cured him."[11]

Jesse Fisher, the ranch foreman and a cousin of Viola's, received a compound fracture of the leg when a horse kicked him through the corral fence. Viola took him to Tombstone, but finding no doctor there, pressed on to Fort Huachuca. After leaving him at the post hospital, Viola set out on the return trip to Tombstone, but the exhausted horse fell, catching its foot and breaking a buggy wheel. She managed to extricate the animal and cover it with the fur buggy robe, then walked to Charleston for help.

On another errand of mercy—this time while Viola drove a young cowhand suffering from chills and fever to the Bisbee hospital—one of the horses lunged forward and broke the wagon tongue. Viola and the sick boy fixed the wagon and arrived in Bisbee at two in the morning, only to find there were no rooms available at the hotel. A young miner just getting off work saw their predicament and said, "Come along home with

Viola and John.

me. Mother will put you up." Viola thought, "Well, . . . the boy has a mother and I guess I can't go too far wrong by driving off with him." So she did.

Over the years, Viola had several health problems. She suffered through an ovarian pregnancy and a life-threatening miscarriage, gall bladder ailments, and surgery. At one time, "her life was despaired and everyone tiptoed about the house. The minister [was] called, [and] the family sat with grave faces." John Slaughter's grief was "deep and real," the only time Viola ever saw the tough cowman with tears in his eyes. She assured him that she would live. "Her recoverey [*sic*] was a minor miracle in Tombstone social and medical circles."

The practical, compassionate woman had another side, a somewhat prudish attitude fostered by her sheltered upbringing and inexperience. As newlyweds, she and John visited Tucson during the Fiesta de San Agustín. Viola was shocked to see the Mexican women "drinking and gambling and sitting at bars" and insisted that John return her to the hotel, for she feared disgrace if anyone spied her in such places. Likewise, she

spurned the manager's offer of a box at Tombstone's Bird Cage Theater and never did attend a play there, a decision she later regretted.

Early on, people often mistook handsome young Viola, with her black hair and large, dark-brown eyes, for John's daughter. The two were, at times, "a bit jealous of one another," and "when Mexican gallants paid her extravagant compliments or courtesies, . . . [John] would twit [her] about them." Viola was "always thinking men were flirting or making eyes at [her] and wanted Mr. Slaughter to do something about it, to stop them. 'But, Vi,' he'd say, 'I saw nothing.'"

She got back at him. One day while she was visiting Tombstone, an inebriated acquaintance, "Whistling Dick," tried to help her out of the buggy. Viola indignantly told him she could take care of herself. She did not mention the occurrence to Slaughter, but he heard about it later and asked her why she had kept it a secret. "You always used to seem to think that I could take care of myself," she told her husband, "so now I'm doing it, so I never thought anything about the incident."

For the most part, John pampered Viola, smiled at her foibles, and indulged her whims. His affectionate attitude persisted even when as sheriff he raced out of the house to a murder scene—brandishing bulletless guns, emptied by a nervous Viola when she cleaned a closet. His only comment as he returned for ammunition was "I say, Vi, I say."

Slaughter "always wanted [Viola] to look pretty and dress well." Mrs. Billy Fourr recalled meeting the newlyweds when they first came to Arizona and stopped to water their livestock at Fourr's 4F Ranch in the Dragoon Mountains. Even on a cattle drive, the Slaughters were "riding in a light spring wagon and Viola was beautifully dressed."[12]

Because of his weak lungs, Slaughter never liked to dance. But he insisted that Viola attend festivities "in [her] very best dress" and have a good time. The many house guests at the San Bernardino meant parties, picnics, camping trips, dances, and barbecues, "always fun of some sort going on." On one occasion, a large group "drove all over the ranch country singing to the Mexicans and everyone . . . [not] return[ing] to the ranch until 3:30 a.m. and [Viola] went and wakened Mr. S and told

him about all the fun [they] had. He was so happy [they'd] all had a good time and laughed with [her] over [the] fun."

John gave Viola a brooch and earrings of fine gold filigree for their wedding and brought dress goods back from business trips. On the ranch, he was "always bringing her gifts—little bouquets of the first wildflowers or any blossoms he found as he rode the range . . . the first garden radishes [and] other little tributes." He sent away especially for seeds for her favorite late green corn and had the ranchhands make successive plantings so that she could grow corn until late fall. As he prospered, he gave her more jewelry; a sewing machine; an organ; a piano; trips to the East, Midwest, and California; nice furniture; fine china and silver; and a fancy, diamond-paned, mail-order window for the living room.

Viola returned the pampering. She laid out John's clothes every day, rendering him "very helpless" if she was away. On one occasion, John had to ask a family friend for help, not knowing how to assemble his wardrobe. When a Tombstone tailor made John a suit of two different pieces of material, Viola sent it back, prompting the man to remark that the suit fit Slaughter but not his wife. Family friend Dick Wilson overheard the comment and knocked the tailor down. He never again tried to palm off bolt ends on the Slaughters.

Well aware of her power over her husband, Viola used it carefully. During a cattle drive through extremely rough country in Mexico, a horse became so unmanageable that Slaughter "lost his temper completely, swore and threatened to 'kill the damned beast.'" Viola, an expert rider who loved to race with her brothers, pretended to need John's immediate assistance with her mount. By the time he finished helping her, he had cooled down and spared the recalcitrant horse's life. When John later sold the animal for forty dollars, Viola teasingly insisted that the money belonged rightfully to her.

She intervened again when a disgruntled cowboy, who was giving bookkeeper Addie a hard time about his commissary account, found himself facing John's rifle. Though Addie begged him to stop, her father kept poking the cowboy with the tip of the gun until Viola, who was recuperating from an operation, ran out of the house "in an ugly Mother Hubbard

Addie Slaughter at the San Bernardino.

dress, . . . swiping fresh paint all over [the dress]." Only then did Slaughter put down his gun. The cowboy left the yard, and the affair blew over.

When General George Crook held his momentous meeting with the Chiricahua Apache Geronimo in 1886, at Cañon de los Embudos on the Slaughter property just south of the Mexican border, John was at the ranch and wrote Viola about Geronimo's expected surrender. She and her friend, Emma Ferrington, made a hasty trip from Tombstone but did not get to see the historic event. The officer in charge "would allow no one to accompany him or his men."

John sometimes chose to ignore his wife. Viola and her friend Mathilde Hampe accompanied him on a cattle-buying trip to a Mormon settlement in Sonora. John, who "always rode at one pace, a steady rhythmic pace on and on without ever looking back," soon left the women "away behind him . . . [they] had to spur [their] horses and race to catch up with him. [They'd] gone through some awful brush . . . [and were] a sight with stockings and clothes all torn in the brush." When

they finally overtook him, Mrs. Hampe exploded, "You don't pay a bit of attention to us, don't look after us at all. We might be killed." John "never said a word, just rode on, on."

And when Astin Dam on the ranch needed repair, Slaughter "would take a lot of workmen and horses . . . and fix the dam [because] every year portions of it were washed out when flood waters came." Viola repeatedly told her husband, "Mr. Slaughter, if you'd get a surveyor and really put in a proper dam you'd not have all this trouble, taking up the time of all your workmen," but he "simply would not."

Viola endured one term as a representative's wife when John served Cochise County in the territorial leg[illegible]ature. On the morning of his election, Viola informed her husband that she was going right down on the streets of Douglas to shake hands with every man she met. "I say, Vi, I say," stuttered John. "You can't do that. Why do you want to?" She replied, "Because I can't remember faces and I don't want to miss anyone who voted for you." The Slaughters and Edith Stowe lived in the Adams Hotel in Phoenix during the legislative session.[13] Viola

Willie Slaughter and his wife, Rosalie.

despised most of the other legislators' wives and said she could not handle the hypocrisy of political life.

In 1909, when he was in his late sixties, John began "slowing down" a bit. Willie, his only son, had always been in poor health and was unable to help run the ranch; he died in 1911. Though John, Viola, and Edith Stowe continued to live at San Bernardino, the answer seemed to be leasing out the ranch. This arrangement gave them the opportunity to travel to Texas, California, and other places.[14]

Although the frontier had long since passed, violence occasionally erupted in remote southeastern Arizona. In May 1921, Jesse Fisher was murdered in an attempted robbery at the ranch store. There was reason to believe that the killers might return for John and Viola, so they moved into Douglas. It took a bit of fast talking on Viola's part to convince John to leave the San Bernardino. "Now I never did like ranch life," Viola told her husband. "It's the life you wanted and I have lived it and helped and done all I could, but there is no sense staying here any longer. We're going to get away." In the late summer or early fall of 1921, the Slaughters and Edith Stowe moved to the Fisher Apartments on Avenue D in Douglas. Viola was sixty-one, and John was nearly eighty.

A few months later, on February 16, 1922, John Slaughter died. He and Viola had been married almost forty-three years. Viola, Addie, and the four Slaughter grandchildren inherited the San Bernardino Ranch, which they transferred to the John H. Slaughter Ranch, Inc.[15] The Bank of Douglas and a longtime friend, Sam Applewhite, managed estate affairs. The bank leased the ranch, both north and south of the international border, to a number of different cattlemen, including Harry Knight, Joe and Jim Hunt, and Roy Brown. A Dr. Calderon eventually purchased the Mexican portion, and ranchers Marion and Ben Williams bought the U.S. part of the San Bernardino.

After John's death, Viola purchased a home in Douglas, where she and Edith Stowe lived for many years. In her late seventies, Viola was "alert, spry, [with] an abundance of energy that tires younger folk. She is always jumping up, getting something, returning. She is well dressed, tightly corseted . . . [with]

Viola in the 1939 Douglas Rodeo parade.

bobbed white hair, beautifully groomed." Because of the irritating sulphur fumes emitted by the Douglas smelter, she constantly nibbled tiny bits of candy "for her throat." Except for a heart condition, she enjoyed good health and intended to live to 105 and have "a lot of fun doing it."

Her prim outlook on the world had diminished with age—she called her new attitude "being broad." When, in the course of a reminiscence, she had to quote a curse word spoken by her husband or a cowboy, she uttered it with a mischievous expression of delight at her daring. She liked her guests to smoke, and she served wine before dinner, "when the day has seen a hard trip," and before bed, "so you will rest better."

Still proud of her fine furnishings and comfortable home, Viola's southern background flavored her treatment of servants. Considerate but firm, she was tight with praise, saying something was "good, but it could be better." In 1937, she proudly showed visitors a black satin dress and matching coat, which she had just had made up from material that John had brought her from Kansas City fifty years before.

Still "Aunty Slaughter" to everyone but her closest friends,

who called her "Vi," she enjoyed celebrating her September 18 birthday each year with telegrams, flowers, and letters from "her children, the boys and girls she raised or who stayed as guests on the ranch." The woman who had once planned to jump horses over the earthquake cracks in Mexico raced her horse in the Douglas Rodeo parade when she served as grand marshal in 1939.

On April 1, 1941, only a few weeks after the unexpected death of Addie, who had been staying with her, Cora Viola Howell Slaughter died at her home in Douglas. One of Arizona's outstanding pioneer women had passed into history.[16]

NOTES

[1]Bernice Cosulich and Edith Stratton Kitt of Tucson interviewed Cora Viola Slaughter in her Douglas home on December 9-11, 1937. I have incorporated their notes (located at the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson) into what I have called CVS Memoirs. Unless otherwise indicated, I have taken all quotes and basic information from this source. John Slaughter's biography by Allen A. Erwin, *The Southwest of John Horton Slaughter, 1841-1922* (Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1965), is unreliable in many details. John H. Slaughter was born in Louisiana on October 2, 1841. Cora Viola Howell was born on September 18, 1860, in Missouri.

[2]John Slaughter and Eliza Adeline Harris were married in San Antonio, Texas, in 1871. Of the four children born to them, two died before the Slaughters moved to Arizona in 1878. In later years, John and Viola tried to find Eliza Adeline's grave in Phoenix, but the marker was gone and records were unavailable.

[3]In 1880, most San Pedro ranchers had herds of fifty to 250, except John Slaughter's 2,500 head and the 3,600 head on the Babocomari Ranch, which Dr. Edward B. Perrin owned at the time. Jay J. Wagoner, *History of the Cattle Industry in Southern Arizona, 1540-1940*, University of Arizona Bulletin No. 20 (April, 1952), p. 42; Wagoner, *Early Arizona: Prehistory to Civil War* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975), pp. 190-91.

[4]The railroad was the Silver City, Deming & Pacific, later the Southern Pacific. David F. Myrick, *Railroads of Arizona*, 3 volumes (Glendale, California: Trans-Anglo Books, 1984), vol. 3, pp. 56 and 62; map, p. 69.

[5]Dozens of travel diaries, including those of Mormon Battalion members and emigrants, mention the deserted rancho of San Bernardino. Four of the most informative are John Russell Bartlett, *Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora, and Chihuahua, Connected with the United States and Mexican Boundary Commission, During the Years 1850, '51, '52, and '53*, 2 vols. (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1854); Henry F. Dobyns, ed., *Hepah, California! The Journal of Cave Johnson Couts from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico to Los Angeles During the Years 1848-49* (Tucson: Arizona Pioneers' Historical Society, 1961); Douglas S. Watson, ed., *The Santa Fe Trail to California, 1849-1852: Journal and Drawings of H. M. T. Powell* (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1931); transcript of "Official Journal of Lieut. Colonel Philip St. George Cooke," Department of History, LDS Church, Salt Lake City, Utah.

[6]"Out of 7,000 adobes that were used to build the two houses of the ranch, there were but 120 whole ones recovered from the ruins." CVS Memoirs. See also Susan M. DuBois and Ann W. Smith, *The 1887 Earthquake in San Bernardino Valley, Sonora: Historic Accounts and Intensity Patterns in Arizona*, Special Paper No. 3 (Tucson: Bureau of Geology and Mineral Technology, University of Arizona, December, 1980).

The *Great Register of Voters* for Cochise County, 1884 and 1888, both list Amazon Howell as a rancher with Tombstone as his residence. It is assumed the Howells moved to San Bernardino in 1885 or 1886, then back to the Tombstone area after the earthquake demolished their house. Stonewall died of pneumonia in Tombstone in 1889, just one day short of his twenty-sixth birthday. Amazon died the next year, August 29, 1890. Both are buried in the Tombstone Cemetery, not to be confused with the Boothill Cemetery, also in Tombstone.

The name for the rocky promontory apparently dates back to the Spanish colonial period and means "Mesa of the Advance Guard."

[7]Addie and Willie Slaughter and Jimmy Howell were often away at school during this time. Addie attended Field's Seminary in Oakland, California, from 1891 to 1893; Jimmy and Willie both went to St. Matthews Academy in San Mateo, California, and to General City Business College in Quincy, Illinois. Viola moved to the ranch about 1892. According to a newspaper account, in late April 1893, Indians killed a cowboy, Jake Bowman, in the mountains on the Mexican side of the ranch. On their way to the hot springs at Cajon Bonito, Bowman and a friend had come by the ranch and invited the Slaughters to accompany them, but John had said they were too busy. When he found out that Bowman had been killed, John ripped boards from the new house he was building and sent them down to Cajon Bonito to be used as a coffin. CVS Memoirs.

[8]Apache May's dress caught on fire when she and the other children were playing near a pot of boiling water.

[9]John Slaughter was so particular that he used the tank water for domestic purposes and had the drinking water piped directly to the house from the spring.

[10]Frankie Howell Stillman, "Memories of San Bernardino," unpublished ms. written after she made a 1960 visit to the ranch. She died in 1968.

[11]In 1877 or 1878, John had a cancerous growth on his hip and underwent a very painful but effective plaster cure in San Francisco. After that, he always kept on hand some of the salve used in the plasters and cured two other people. CVS Memoirs.

[12]Ethel Robertson Macia typescript, in Burton DeVere files, Tombstone.

[13]Edith Stowe accompanied the Slaughters to Phoenix and obtained a position as clerk for the territorial legislature.

[14]Willie's widow was Rosalie Newenham, who had taught at the ranch school. They had two sons. One died in infancy; the other, John Horton Slaughter II, grew up in Douglas and married Leah Ports. He died about 1974.

[15]Addie married Dr. William Arnold Greene and had three children: John Slaughter, William Arnold, Jr., and Adeline Howell.

[16]Viola took care of Edith Stowe after she became paralyzed, but finally had to put her in the Cochise County Hospital, where she died in December 1938. In her will, Viola gave such items as Apache May's clothing, John's pearl-handled gun, and her own sidesaddle to the Arizona Pioneers' Historical Society.

CREDITS—The photo on p. 392 is courtesy of May Watkins Burns; on pp. 394 and 414 courtesy of the author; all others are courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson.